

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Sep 12th 2014

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye,
but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?

How quick we are to judge! How fast we are to note the failings of those around us. It's a way of life that can be a constant scrutiny of others, checking out the behavior, clothes, parenting skills and education of those with whom we come in contact. For some of us, we are distracted in Church where we evaluate the dress, children or even the piety of those around us, grateful that we are above it all.

Somehow we don't really believe Jesus's continuing admonishments that we should not judge others. "Well, he didn't mean me," we assure ourselves.

Today's gospel is a direct message to us from Jesus. Stop looking for the faults of others and focus on our own distracted and sometimes ungenerous hearts. Our need to compare ourselves to others may come out of our own insecurity. If we let ourselves evaluate and judge someone else, maybe for just a minute, we feel a little better about the flaws we keep so carefully hidden.

When Pope Francis preached on this gospel he echoed Jesus' use of the word hypocrite," saying to us, "Those who live judging their neighbor, speaking ill of their neighbor, are hypocrites because they lack the strength and the courage to look to their own shortcomings."

The pope then encouraged us to make "a gesture of conversion" by stopping gossip. "There is no such thing as innocent gossip," he said. Instead he suggested that if there is someone we have the urge to talk about, "Go and pray for him! Go and do penance for her! And then, if it is necessary, speak to that person who may be able to seek remedy for the problem. But don't tell everyone!"

It is not a heavy theological message today – it is a simple teaching for our lives. If we want to be a real follower of Jesus, we must stop judging and gossiping. But how do we break these lifelong habits? How can we end these ways of thinking that are celebrated in western culture in reality tv and tabloid journalism? With prayer.

We will feel less insecure and feel less need to look around at the ways others live, if we really feel deeply in our hearts how much we are loved by God. Letting God's love, a love that transcends the very flaws we want to hide, will heal the need in our lives to look so harshly on others. We can allow God's endless love to wash over us until we really feel how much God delights in us.

Loving God, let me open my heart to your love. I beg you for the grace to set my heart on fire with an awareness of how much you love me. Then, give me the grace today to release me from my habits of looking on others with such scorn and help me to see how much you love them as much as you love me.

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